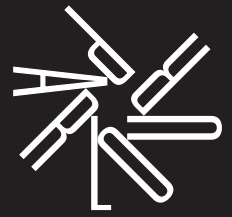


# 03. Part-time work:



: women,  
equity,  
architecture.

Meaningful part-time work in architecture is essential to workplace equity. It allows employees to balance life and work demands – to be challenged and fulfilled at work, while also devoting adequate time and energy to family life or external activities. It also ensures practices retain key talent, experience and professional knowledge.

If the industry is to achieve true gender equity, serious part-time work needs to be a more available and acceptable career option for everyone.

This guide outlines the benefits to practices and employees and offers strategies for creating and promoting meaningful part-time work.



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# What is meaningful part-time work?

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Securing part-time work is not the only important goal. For part-time work to be a viable part of a fulfilling career, it needs to be meaningful work.

Quality part-time work has many of the same characteristics as quality full-time work:

- It is interesting, diverse and matches job demands with skills.
- It fully utilises an employee's skills, experience and interests.
- It includes access to training, development and promotional opportunities.
- It should also involve the same benefits, rights and conditions, such as equal pay rates, autonomy and job satisfaction.

## Part-time project architects

It's important to recognise that not all jobs within architecture are conducive to part-time employment, but there are many roles that can be handled with ease by an experienced part-time employee.

There is a widespread belief that it is impossible to be a part-time project architect, but the reality is that many full-time project architects juggle a variety of professional roles and commitments in their busy work week, and few senior employees work full-time on any one project.

Some practices are finding that with careful planning, part-time project architects can be utilised very effectively on a range of projects.

## Mentoring and staff development

Part-time project architects can also be paired with a less experienced 2IC, who is ready to step up to a more responsible role but needs advice and mentoring.

## Practice management assistance

Depending on the architect's skills and seniority, part-time employees can assist with important practice management tasks such as implementing new systems, rewriting manuals and policies, working on marketing materials or recruitment, working on client reviews, or helping with training and mentoring.

Many of these tasks are not necessarily suitable as long-term roles, but could be ideal for an experienced employee transitioning back into the workforce after a break. As well as the practice making good use of the employee's skills and experience, it can give the employee increased exposure to directors or senior staff, and valuable insights into how the practice works.

## Definition of part-time

The definition of part-time work in Australia is less than 38 hours per week, however the term usually refers to work of a permanent nature, involving substantial hours (usually 20 to 25 per week).

It's primarily this form of part-time work that is dealt with in this guide, but people who are engaged in other types of flexible work may also find useful tips.

• See Parlour guide: **Flexibility** for advice on other flexible working arrangements.



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## Why does it matter?

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While women currently represent the majority of part-time employees in architecture, both men and women may adopt different flexible work patterns across their careers in order to juggle other roles, such as studying, teaching, parenting or transitioning into retirement.

**Statistics** Data from the 2011 Australian census suggests that architecture is less supportive of part-time work than other professions, and that this particularly affects women. Only 17% of architects work part-time compared with 27% of all professionals. The difference is more marked for women than men – 13% of male architects work part-time compared to 15% of all male professionals, whereas 29% of female architects have part-time hours compared to 38% of all professional women.

This suggests significant implications for women’s careers in architecture. This is also borne out by the Parlour survey, in which many women respondents expressed frustration at the difficulty of being taken seriously when working part-time.

**Perceptions** There is a common perception within architecture that a stint of part-time work (however temporary) can halt a career in its tracks; that architecture is an all-or-nothing pursuit. Part-time jobs are hard to come by, and those that exist are often unchallenging menial roles.

Part-time employees can also be perceived differently, depending on the reasons for their part-time role. If they are working part-time because they are balancing work in practice with an academic career, curating an exhibition or setting up their own business, part-time work is considered

in a much more positive light than for those who are working part-time to balance caring responsibilities. Despite perceptions to the contrary, each of these part-time employees may be similarly motivated and committed to their career.

Sadly, part-time employees with family commitments are often perceived as no longer serious about their careers or the profession. This is rarely true. Becoming an architect requires a huge amount of time, money and dedication, and few wish to step away from a profession that has been their focus and passion for so long. However, the damaging perception that part-time workers aren’t interested in continuing to develop their skills can rapidly become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### Practices

Nurturing a motivated, challenged workforce makes good business sense. Meaningful part-time work leads to higher productivity and commitment, ensures long-term growth and development of staff despite short-term circumstances, and helps to retain a pipeline of future leaders.

### Employees

The availability of serious part-time work is essential to the development of many women’s careers (and some men), and will allow them to participate to their full potential.

### The profession

Denied the opportunity to undertake meaningful work, male and female part-time employees may leave their practice, or the profession altogether. This is a huge waste of talent and experience, and can be very costly for practices and the profession, as well as individual architects.



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## What can we do?

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Changing negative perceptions of part-time work and part-time workers is crucial to developing more meaningful part-time architectural work. This needs to be tackled by the profession as a whole – practices, employees and professional bodies.

Ultimately practices are the ones who can actually create and support serious part-time opportunities within architecture, but part-time employees can also play their part by being proactive, communicating their skills, experience and ambitions to their employer, and looking for opportunities to learn and progress.

## Practices

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There are many things that practices can do to explore the potential of meaningful part-time work, and much that can be learnt from other professions.

### **Recognise the advantages that part-time employees bring**

Part-time architects are often highly motivated and committed and can bring specific advantages to a practice. Consider the following:

- Part-time employees can be a great way to boost or retain the embodied knowledge of practice without having to dramatically increase costs.
- Part-timers tend to work more efficiently and waste less time on personal administration than full-time equivalents.

- Being able to work part-time often eases the strain of the work/life juggle for employees, thereby increasing the energy and focus they can bring to the role, and increasing their productivity at work.
- They're well aware that time is precious, and every hour in the office needs to count.

### **See the value for money**

Senior part-time architects are often excellent value for money, offering access to significant expertise and experience at a reduced (pro rata) cost.

- Consider what your practice actually needs. Is it particular work outcomes, or time in the chair? It is often more effective to have a slightly more senior person working a three- or four-day week than it is to have a full-time junior for the same salary.

### **Explore permanent part-time**

Some practices see part-time work as a stop-gap measure until the employee is able to return to full-time work. However, permanent part-time arrangements can also bring benefits to all.

- Don't assume that part-time roles are temporary, and that all employees seek to return to full-time work.

### **Consider job-share arrangements**

Job sharing is currently unusual in architecture, but many architects raise it as a model well worth exploring.

Two part-timers in a job-share arrangement may offer a practice double the talent, with a wider breadth of accessible skills and experience. With plenty of time to engage in external responsibilities and pursuits, they may well bring more energy and creativity to their role in the office.



- Consider whether two part-time employees working closely together might work better than one full time.
- Explore models that enable effective and efficient job-sharing arrangements. There are useful precedents in other professions. For example, among medical professionals, very complex patient backgrounds and information is rapidly exchanged at shift changes, hospital changes, and between different health disciplines. It could be quite possible to do this in architecture.

### Communicate and be clear

Everyone is different. There will be a variety of reasons for working part-time, a variety of expectations of the role and the length of part-time employment, and a variety of career aspirations. It's important that employer and employee understand each other's point of view, the parameters of the working arrangement and how it may change in the future.

- Make sure that everyone is clear on what is being offered – is it a temporary reduction of hours with an expectation of the employee rapidly returning to full-time work? Or will the part-time arrangement be longer term?
- Ensure all agreements are recorded.
- Have a process for reviewing and develop arrangements in a timely manner, without undue pressure.

### Encourage flexibility for all

Part-time roles can be beneficial for both sides. They enable employees to balance work with external interests and demands, and allow a practice to respond quickly when projects and workloads change.

Some practices find that part-time employees can help them manage changing workloads, with an ability to step in to do extra paid hours or days during busy times

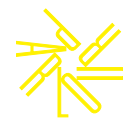
or when a colleague is ill. The part-time employee welcomes the occasional influx of extra work and cash flow, and the employer has a trusted, experienced employee to assist when the practice hits a project crunch point. While this kind of arrangement will not suit all part-timers, others may welcome the chance to work more hours on an occasional basis.

- Explore how the well-managed, appropriate and flexible use of part-time employees can help the practice manage fluctuating workflow. This may be particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized practices.
- It's important to give part-timers the option of saying yes or no to additional paid work, depending on their own needs and circumstances. Don't make assumptions about interest or availability.

### Use processes and technology

Having the correct processes and technology in place is important to help support business efficiency and facilitate improved communication between practice and employees.

- If you expect your part-time employee to be accessible at home for consultation on urgent matters, ensure they have a smartphone or laptop, and files are easily accessible from home (if required). This will help to minimise client awareness of their absence from the office, and allow them to keep on top of essential information.
- If you are hoping that your employee will perform extra hours on an as-needs basis, ensure that HR systems are flexible enough to allow an hourly rate system (perhaps with a weekly cap) for a period of time.



## Employees

Though you obviously can't dictate terms with your employer when trying to secure your ideal workplace arrangements, it's surprising what can be achieved with clear, confident communication and strategic thinking.

Spend some time analysing the way your skills and experience can be put to best use on a part-time basis. Think of the benefits for the practice as well as yourself. Fearless straight talking and a solid business case can go a long way to negotiating a part-time working arrangement that will satisfy everyone.

### **Do your research**

When considering a prospective employer, spend some time researching the workplace culture and conditions.

- Find out about the way part-time work is understood by the practice. Does it offer quality part-time work? Is part-time work equitably available, including at senior levels? Do part-time and full-time employees doing the same work receive the same hourly rate? Are similar opportunities for skills training (pro rata) available for part-timers? Is a period of part-time work considered a 'career killer' in this firm? Or is it universally accepted and supported?
- Even if you are seeking full-time employment, it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with the company culture and opportunities for part-time work before your circumstances and needs change.

### **Be open about your interests and ambitions**

One of the risks of becoming a part-time worker is getting locked into repetitive work, and losing access to tasks that

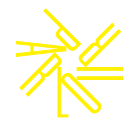
entail critical and creative thinking and problem solving. Your employer may make assumptions about your preferred level of engagement within the company. Don't let them. Be clear about your ambitions within the practice.

- Be proactive about communicating the types of projects and tasks you'd like to be involved in.
- Speak to your employer about your interests and capabilities, and how you can ably tackle more responsible roles in the company.
- Make it clear that you intend to continue working and progressing in your career.
- Think about your key skills and how you may be able to utilise them effectively on a part-time basis. Can you train and mentor new staff? Do you have experience maintaining and nurturing existing client relationships? Make suggestions to your employer.
- Stay abreast of new projects and roles that are coming up within your practice. Be bold and enthusiastic. Put your hand up for tasks and roles that interest you.

### **Be efficient and disciplined**

Focus on being as efficient as possible. Successful part-time employees often say that the key to their success is organisation, discipline and excellent time management – both at home and at work.

- If your practice is new to part-time work, discuss how you can boost your productivity and efficiency in the workplace. Discuss effective time-management and reducing your administrative load to increase productivity.
- Be organised and avoid distractions.
- Be selective about the meetings you attend.
- Consider requesting virtual meetings with colleagues or clients via Skype to avoid unproductive hours in the car. You may find that your client is as eager to improve efficiency as you are.



- Try to anticipate situations and challenges that may present themselves and prepare in advance so that important issues don't blindside the project team or principals when you're not there.
- Recognise when enough work is enough. It's tempting to spend countless additional hours on a design, but deadlines need to be met and outcomes achieved within a set budget. Sometimes you have to let things go.

### **Be flexible and realistic**

Part-time hours will inevitably mean a reduced level of engagement and, in all likelihood, some level of reduced variety. There will be times when you may feel under-utilised. But don't despair. Be open and flexible, and see the possibilities grow.

- Be proactive and inventive, seek opportunities within the practice, offer your services within project teams or with practice management.
- Seek opportunities to develop new skills.
- Be realistic. It won't be possible for part-time employees to perform every role. If one door closes, another one will open. Keep an eye out for fresh challenges.

### **Focus on strong communication and trust**

Strong communication between principals/directors, project team members and clients is very important to successful working relationships in architecture, and it's even more so when employees are working flexibly or part time.

- Don't leave anything to chance. Keep the lines of communication open and make sure everyone understands your availability and the progress of your work.
- Build trust with your employer so that they know you can deliver the work outcomes they need. Each personal success will reinforce

to them that your part-time arrangement is working, and that you have your workload and professional responsibilities under control.

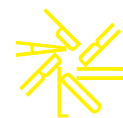
- If you're in a senior role, trust in your team members to progress with the work on the days you're not there. Don't be afraid to delegate. Junior employees will develop skills and confidence while working semi-autonomously on your days off, creating an excellent development opportunity.
- When you are at work, speak up, be opinionated, and be as visible as possible. Nurture existing relationships with colleagues, and develop new ones. Continue to network.

### **Make good use of technology**

Despite concerns of omnipresent technology blurring work and private lives, technology can be turned to your advantage if carefully managed. One of the benefits of new communication is the ease with which it is possible to stay in touch. Technology can remove the obstacles that once made part-time work difficult or impossible.

It's not only beneficial to your employer or client to be able to reach you about an important project development, but it's useful for you to remain in the loop about what's happening at work. It can provide a relatively easy way of increasing your engagement with work without increasing your physical hours in the office.

- Consider setting checking work emails at the beginning and end of the day so you're on top of the latest project instructions and developments, and there are no nasty surprises on your next day at work.
- Consider identifying some rules for your colleagues (and yourself) about your preferred level of contact (taking into account the needs of your employer).
- Be clear about your availability. Consider setting some boundaries to ensure your private time is not dominated by work.



## The profession

Meaningful part-time work is not well understood by the profession as a whole, although some practices use it very effectively. Professional bodies are well placed to help develop knowledge and understanding that will benefit both practices and employees.

### **Help explore and educate about the possibilities**

Professional bodies can assist by sponsoring or supporting research and via continuing professional development programs and other educational initiatives.

- Incorporate information about options for managing part-time roles, along with resources and case studies demonstrating different models into continuing professional development programs and other educational initiatives.
- Support research into the effective use of part-time workers in a range of practice types and scales. This could include investigating precedents from other professions.

**Acknowledgement. This guide draws on the excellent advice provided by Misty Waters in two articles for Parlour: 'Part-time Architects – Top Tips for Employers' and 'Part-time Architects – Tips for Architects Returning to Work'.**

### **Rights and responsibilities**

The *Fair Work Act 2009* provides employees with a legal right to request flexible working arrangements, including part-time work. To be eligible, employees need to have worked for their employer for at least 12 months. Eligibility is also dependent on the following circumstances: the employee is a parent (or responsible for the care of a child); they are a carer; they have a disability; they're 55 or older; they're experiencing violence from a family member; or they're caring for a family member who is a victim of violence.

Employers must seriously consider a request for flexible working arrangements, and must reply in writing, but may refuse on reasonable business grounds.

The Architects Award defines a part-time employee as someone who is employed to work less than 38 hours per week. It states that part-time employees should be paid a percentage (according to hours worked) of the weekly wage appropriate to an employee classification per hour. The Award also emphasises that part-time employees are eligible to accrue all the provisions of the award on a pro rata basis, and that the spread of ordinary working hours will be the same as those prescribed for full-time workers.

**Note: This is offered as an overview only. Readers are reminded that legislation may change and they are advised to check current legislation at the time of reading.**





### Credits

The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice are an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011–2014), led by Naomi Stead of the University of Queensland.

The development of the guides was led by Justine Clark and Naomi Stead, working with Susie Ashworth and Neph Wake. The guides were designed by Catherine Griffiths. Full credits can be found in the introduction to the guides. The guides are published with the support of the Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne.

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## Further resources

### Best Practice Guide – Work and Family Fair Work Ombudsman

<http://www.fairwork.gov.au/resources/best-practice-guides/pages/work-and-family>

### Quality at Work: The Quality Part-time Work Imperative

Dr Kate Barnett, Dr Rasika Ranasinghe,  
Dr Ann-Louise Hordacre, Australian Institute for  
Social Research, The University of Adelaide, 2011

[http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/uploaded\\_files/qptw\\_summary\\_report.pdf](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/uploaded_files/qptw_summary_report.pdf)

### Professional Mums

<http://www.professionalmums.net/au/>

### Architects Award 2010

Fair Work Commission

[https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/documents/modern\\_awards/pdf/MA000079.pdf](https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/documents/modern_awards/pdf/MA000079.pdf)

## Further reading

### 'Part-time Architects – Top Tips for Employers'

Misty Waters, Parlour

<http://www.archiparlour.org/part-time-architects-top-tips-for-employers/>

### 'Part-time Architects – Tips for Architects Returning to Work'

Misty Waters, Parlour

<http://www.archiparlour.org/part-time-architects-tips-for-architects-returning-to-work/>

### 'The Four Habits of Highly Effective Part-Time Workers'


Lakshmi Singh, Women's Agenda

<http://www.womensagenda.com.au/future-of-work/job-design/the-four-habits-of-highly-effective-part-time-workers/201403243776>

### Five Reasons Why Part-time Work is Growing'

Kate Mills, Women's Agenda

<http://www.womensagenda.com.au/future-of-work/job-design/five-reasons-why-part-time-work-is-growing/201401303504>

See Parlour  for a range of articles about work/life issues in Australian architecture.

<http://www.archiparlour.org/topics/workplace/>

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